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# Getting Your Message Out

**A Media  
Guide for  
Team Nutrition**







# The Media

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**N**ow that Team Nutrition is underway in your school, you can multiply the benefits of every event by attracting the interest of the media. Media coverage brings Team Nutrition messages into the community – reinforcing the nutrition and physical activity information children get at school, and winning public support. It can also put the spotlight on your school and its leadership role in enhancing children's health and education.

You do not have to be a media expert to work effectively with the media, but you do need to know the basics. If you work within

the school organization, check with your supervisor to make sure you have the authority to speak with the media. Also, if the organization has a communications or public relations staff, be sure to ask for their help.

Newspapers, television, and radio are your best bets for reaching the community. They need to fill their pages and airtime every day with something new and interesting. Even using the smallest newspaper or radio station will get your message out to hundreds more people than you could ever talk to in person.



**ON AIR**  
**ON AIR**





# Types of Media

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## Print Media

**Newspapers.** Newspapers are usually published daily or weekly and contain current news, editorials, feature articles, and advertising. Read the local newspaper and watch for lifestyle, fitness, food, medical, health, science, and consumer articles. Write down the reporter's name that appears as a *byline* on one of the articles. You will then have the specific name of a person to contact. (See "Tips for Talking to Reporters") Or, call the paper's city desk or news desk and ask for the names of the editors responsible for the topics that correspond to your activities. Editors and reporters may also be listed in the "masthead" on the editorial page or on the paper's web site.

When dealing with newspapers, think local. Local community papers usually give schools the best opportunity for reaching your intended audience of parents and other opinion leaders. Larger metropolitan papers have many other stories competing for space—a school nutrition story might get overlooked in favor of a story with more drama.

**Newsletters.** Many organizations and professional associations publish newsletters with information of interest to their members. Contact organizations that may be interested in using your story.

**Magazines.** Most magazines are published monthly. You will have better luck in working with smaller, regional magazines that have a local focus. Neighborhood and city magazines are also an effective way of communicating with your target audience. Magazines usually have a much longer lead-time for stories than do newspapers. That means they write their articles far in advance of publication dates. So, start early if you want to have something published in a magazine by a certain date. National magazines tend to be a 'hard nut to crack,' which only means you might have to work harder to get their attention.

## Print Media Pieces

**Feature Articles.** A feature article gives special attention to an issue you want to spotlight. It can have a news or human-interest angle and generally focuses on real people, events, or activities related to the issue. A publication's staff or a paid freelance writer usually writes feature articles. Some smaller publications (like weeklies, newsletters, and neighborhood papers), however, may take a feature story you provide and run it with minor or major rewriting. They might even just take the idea and run their own story. Whatever happens, put your idea in front of them. If they run the story, you have achieved your objective.

To pique an editor's interest, the piece should be both local and timely. Use pictures, anecdotes, examples, and quotes. Quotes from national or local authorities can be very effective in making a case. (See sample.)

**Op-Ed Articles.** Op-ed pieces run opposite the newspaper's editorial page (hence the name "op-ed") and are clearly labeled as opinion pieces. You might urge a community or school leader to submit one—or you can draft an article for a leader to submit. (See sample.)

**Letters to the Editor.** Letters to the editor are usually written in response to a recent news story, a community event, or a current issue. Members of the public can agree or disagree with what they've read, or express opinions about current events. Sometimes the letters inform other readers about community services, issues, or concerns—or appeal to them to join a campaign or support a cause. (See sample.)

Your letter to the editor must be timely. Send it immediately after an article appears to which you want to respond, or when a related issue is in the news. For example, you can write a short letter in



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response to any news or feature article about school children, education, health, diet, or physical activity. A story about low test scores would be an ideal time for a letter to the editor about the link between breakfast and learning. If you are responding to an inaccuracy or misrepresentation, provide an explanation that communicates your key messages. Present the essential facts immediately in the first paragraph of the letter, and use a simple, straightforward style. Because most papers now verify letters, be sure to provide contact information.

Send your letter and call the editorial page editor to follow up a few days later. Expect three weeks between the date you send your letter and the date the paper decides whether or not to print it. You also may be able to submit your letter by Email, so check the publication's Web site or call the office.

## Broadcast Media

**Television.** For television, think action and color! Programming opportunities include community calendar announcements, public service announcements, daily news reports (consumer, medical, health), weekly public affairs segments, and talk shows. Many opportunities exist through cable access stations. And, many of these offer programming in other languages. To get more information you can call, write, or Email a station's public service director and ask for a local programming schedule and personnel guide. If your district has television programming, use it. It is a great way to get students involved. Watch the station you are targeting to get a general feel for the approach and tone of the programs. When you are ready, let the local station know that you—or a school spokesperson—are available to be a guest on talk shows. (See "Tips for Television Appearances.") Also, get students involved through their school television system where available. Include messages to students as part of morning announcements.

**Weathercasters.** One of the most effective ways to get your message out is through local weathercasters. They usually have a significant local following and often will mention activities and show promotional items in conjunction with your activities. They generally appear several times throughout a newscast and it is not unusual for them to mention the activities each time.

Write an introductory letter two weeks before your activity, explaining your event (or program) and requesting the weathercaster's participation. If you have some kind of promotional gift, like a selection of fresh herbs grown by your school or an attractive piece of artwork created by your students, include it with your letter and press kit. If possible, deliver your information and gift in person to the station. That same afternoon, follow up with a phone call to make sure he or she received your package, and try to gauge his or her interest in using the promotional gift or information on the air. Remember to follow up with a quick, sincere note of thanks.

**Radio.** Radio usually targets specific local audiences. It can be much more accessible and less intimidating than newspapers or television. There are message opportunities in public service announcements, community calendars, public affairs shows, daily news reports, talk and call-in shows, and specialty segments on subjects such as health and fitness.

Two things to remember:

- You have to paint word pictures. There are no photos or graphics to help you out.
- Radio is also a great way to reach people who speak languages other than English. If you or a member of your team can do an interview in another language, you boost your chance of getting on the air.



# Getting Media Attention

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## Making Contact

Develop media contacts to get your message out, and coordinate media coverage with your school district's media-relations staff as much as possible. They may already have relationships with reporters. Once you have established a relationship, it is easy to give your contact a quick call and alert him or her to an upcoming story or event. (See "Tips for Talking to Reporters.") Be sure to coordinate media contacts so that reporters are not getting repeat calls from different members of your team. Establishing media relationships will take time. Don't be discouraged if you don't succeed in getting your story covered the first time you try. And don't be shy about trying again.

Get to know reporters before you ask them to do a story. Work with your school foodservice director or manager to find a good time to invite them to have lunch or breakfast at your school. This gives reporters a chance to learn about school meals first hand.

When the time comes for your event or story, give them plenty of notice and then follow up to see if they need additional information.

## The Hook

In approaching the media, called making your *pitch*, you will need a *hook* - an angle that makes your story timely and interesting. A hook could be a tie to a newsworthy local event or a national issue. For example:

- There is an opinion piece in your local paper from a national health expert on the danger of sedentary lifestyles. This is a chance to pitch a feature story about the wellness program at your school.
- A teacher in a local middle school has started a unit on measuring calories and nutrients to teach both math and science skills. At the end of the unit, the students will prepare a meal and do a nutrient analysis. You could send a press release to the local media with an invitation to class and lunch.

## The Pitch

When you want to sell something to the media, you *pitch it*. Some reporters get 50 pitch letters and news releases a day. You need to make yours stand out (see sample pitch letter). Here are some tips:

- Start off by saying you are offering a story idea. Make the purpose clear at the beginning.
- Summarize the idea in one paragraph before going into details. If you can do it in one sentence, that's even better.
- Explain why this story is newsworthy, timely, or unusual.
- Explain why the editor's particular audience would be interested in the story.
- Explain what impact you expect the story to have.

**Press Release.** A press release is an announcement of an event, performance, or other news or publicity item. It answers six questions: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How. You have only a few seconds to arouse a reporter's interest. Make the first sentence an attention grabber. When you are preparing a press release, remember:

- The press release isn't the whole story. It just gets the media interested in the story.
- Make it no more than two pages—single-sided, double-spaced.
- Always put a date on the release.
- Give a contact name and phone number so they can get more information.
- Use an interesting headline to capture their attention. Reporters get thousands of pieces of paper labeled "Press Release" and the trick is to get yours to stand out in the crowd.
- Fax, mail, or Email the press release, and follow up with a phone call within a few days.



**Press Kit.** A press kit is the easiest way to give the media different types of information in an organized package.

*Include:*

- Your press release with information on the event (see sample).
- A short media advisory (see sample) that includes the "who, what, when, where, why and how" of your event. The advisory is a good piece to have for people who request information by fax. Try to keep your advisory to one page and include interview and photo opportunities.
- A backgrounder for your activity. This should include the basic information you want to convey (for example, names, phone numbers, location, participants and background facts).

Organize your materials in a two-pocket folder with the most important materials in front and secondary information in back. Be sure to include contact information in your folder and keep your information as simple and straightforward as possible.

# Tips for Talking to Reporters

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**1. Know your subject.** No matter how knowledgeable you are about the subject, never try to *wing* an interview. Even if a reporter calls and says he or she is on deadline and “just needs to confirm a fact” or “get a quote,” don’t be pressured into responding. Ask the reporter for their questions, the deadline and call back after you check your facts, and BEFORE the deadline.

**2. Be honest.** If you don’t know the answer, say so. Offer to find out, if you can, and call back. If you feel someone else may be more knowledgeable, refer the reporter to that person. Reliable sources are valuable to reporters and you may get more calls in the future.

**3. Be prompt.** Always ask, “What is your deadline?” Offer to do some brief research, and then do it. Don’t feel pressure to answer on the spot. Do respect the media’s tight deadlines.

**4. Know your audience.** Keep in mind who you are trying to reach and what they will want to know.

**5. Stick to key messages.** Identify 2-3 key messages you want to get across. Stick to those messages. Make your points *simple* and *brief*. Keep your answers to the reporter’s questions short. Don’t wander off with long involved answers.

**6. Communicate in sound bites.** These are short, precise statements that get your message out clearly and quickly. Practice ahead of time so you will be ready.

**7. Offer background information.** Data, graphics, audiovisuals, props, and the names of knowledgeable health and education professionals will make your story more attractive.

**8. Return phone calls from reporters.** Call reporters back even if it’s just to say you can’t talk right now but will get back to them later. Don’t let a story appear that says you couldn’t be reached for comment.

**9. Avoid jargon.** Translate technical information into layman’s terms. Use short, catchy phrases to make it interesting.

**10. Be gracious.** If a reporter covers your program, write a thank-you note.





# Tips for Television Appearances

**B**eing a spokesperson on your issue may be easier than you think! Here are a few tips to help you get ready for your television appearance:

- Women should avoid wearing busy, bright clothing. Solid colors are best. People respond well to blue or pastels. Don't wear a lot of jewelry—it can cause glare and make too much “noise.”
- Men should wear medium colors in gray, blue, or brown, and gray or light blue shirts. Avoid neckties with narrow lines. Go for ties with large, soft patterns. Wear socks that match the color of your pants.
- Get to the interview early so you can check out the set and look in the mirror.
- Loosen up your face muscles and reduce nervousness by smiling in an exaggerated way several times.
- Sit up straight in the chair and lean slightly forward to show that you are alert and in control.
- Avoid nervous movements such as swiveling in your chair, moving your feet, or gripping the arms of the chair.
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer.
- Be aware of your body language.
- Keep your answers brief and to the point.
- Take props to help you tell your story—large pictures, food, graphs, or charts.
- Smile. Be enthusiastic. Be positive.
- Stick to your message. Learn to bridge from a question to provide information that gets your key points across.



# Sample Feature Article

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A feature article gives special attention to an issue you want to spotlight. It can have a news or human-interest angle and generally focuses on real people, events, or activities related to the issue.

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*Use official letterhead*

For more information, contact:  
Rodney Moore  
(323) 770-4244

## Forest Glen Helps Kids Make the Nutrition Connection

When Donna Barnes works on colors with her kindergarten class at Forest Glen Elementary School, she brings in a fruit basket. What better example for red than an apple? Orange for an orange? Or yellow for a banana? And, while she teaches her class about colors, she also teaches a valuable lesson about good nutrition. She lets the young students know it is important for them to eat at least five fruits and vegetables every day.

Barnes is doing what many of her counterparts are doing in classrooms all over town—they're teaching nutrition along with regular classroom subjects and making it fun for students.

Knowing that children form eating habits early in life, administrators and teachers want to positively influence students' eating behaviors starting in kindergarten.

Nutrition education is moving into classrooms throughout the Ramsey Unified School District. Teachers are encouraging students to look into the social and cultural influences on the foods they choose to eat. "Lessons are much more effective when they have some personal meaning for students," says Barnes.

Everyone at Forest Glen is working together to connect nutrition education from the dining room to the classroom. In social studies students learn about food from different countries. Food also has an interesting place in history and science classes. And in math, students practice nutrient calculations to check their own diets.

Dr. Delroy Brownell, Superintendent of Ramsey schools, says teachers need preparation to adequately teach nutrition skills. "They should not be expected to simply open a textbook and begin shaping student behavior," he says.

A national survey found that in 1992-1994, only 14 percent of secondary school health education teachers had in-service nutrition education training. And less than half of them taught students about how to follow the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, with which all U.S. schools enrolled in the National School Lunch Program must comply.

At Forest Glen, nutrition education doesn't stop at the school door either. Students are encouraged to help with family menu planning, food shopping, and meal preparation.

# Sample Pitch Letter for Media

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The pitch letter summarizes the story idea you're offering a reporter. It explains why the story is newsworthy and why it would interest the audience. Remember, to get the reporter's attention, your letter must stand out.

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*Use official letterhead if possible*

Ms. Jane Burke  
Education Reporter  
WLMN-TV  
Freemont, NC 27423

Dear Ms. Burke:

What looks like a food court, sounds like a food court, and draws the same teenage crowd? The new Lofton High School dining room! Three months plus \$200,000 and a lot of remodeling equals one completely new dining experience for students. It is scheduled to premier the day that school opens, September 5.

Gone are the institutional green walls of yesterday and the rows and rows of rectangular tables. Now, students' art decorates the walls, and round dining tables encourage socializing. We expect at least a 50 percent increase in the number of nutritious lunches we serve each day.

Students will choose from one of five stations—each serving a variety of attractive, tasty, and nutritious foods. The foods being served are the ones that the students themselves, along with the faculty and staff, told us they wanted. And although it is fast and tastes as good as the food at the mall, it wins the nutrition contest hands down because it's made with new lower fat recipes and include lots of lean meats, fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products.

We invite you and your crew to join us for lunch September 5 at the premier of the Lofton High School dining room. The school is located at 7350 Holmes Road in Freemont. I will call you in a couple of days to confirm the date and arrange for close-in parking.

Sincerely,

Lynn Pierce  
Director, Community Relations  
Freemont School District



# Sample Press Release

**A press release announces an event, performance, or other news or publicity item. It should get the reporter's attention and answer five questions: Who? What? Where? When? and Why?**

*Use official letterhead*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Lynn Pierce  
Director of Community Relations  
Freemont School District  
(225) 373-4848

## School Cafeteria Goes High Fashion

Freemont, NC, August 3—On September 5 students at Lofton High School may wonder if they are eating lunch at the school cafeteria or in the food court at the mall.

But if they look closely they'll see that they are still in school. The lunchroom at Lofton has been transformed—it's now the kind of place where students want to be. There is artwork designed by students, living plants, softer lighting, and music. And there are five "mini-restaurants" serving a variety of healthy foods each day.

The dining room remodeling is part of a larger mission at Lofton to encourage students to eat healthier. Common sense dictates—and research supports—that eating should be a pleasant experience. Food should taste good and look good. Students should have enough time to eat and they should eat in a pleasant setting. Ideas for the dining room's new look came from its customers—the students. A year ago, students were asked to fill out surveys on what they thought were ideal dining conditions.

"We didn't just ask the regulars," says Mary Ann Freed, Lofton's school food service director, "We asked those who went off campus for lunch why they didn't eat here." She predicts the changes will increase use of the dining room by 50 percent or more. This means the school will serve 1,300 students during the three lunch periods that start at 11:30 a.m. each school day. The school has an enrollment of 1,500 students and about 80 faculty and staff.

Freed emphasized the difference between the food prepared at school and most fast food: "We will offer a variety of healthy choices including lean meats, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products," she said. "Through careful planning and better ingredients, we are meeting and going beyond Federal guidelines for nutritional content and it still tastes good."

Surrounded by brightly colored walls and neon signs are five serving stations offering Asian, Mexican, Italian, and other choices each day. No more rails and sliding trays. No more rows of long rectangular tables. The dining room is dotted with large round tables to encourage students to socialize with friends.

The \$200,000 project did not allow for carpeting. But hanging between the numerous skylights are cubes of sound-absorbing material, and the walls have been designed to soften the noise of lunchtime and enhance the eating experience.

NOTE TO EDITORS AND NEWS DIRECTORS: If you want to cover the cafeteria's grand opening, call as soon as possible so we can arrange close-in parking. Please come early for interviews and pictures. And please be out guests for lunch.

# Sample Letter to the Editor

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Each fall, many local newspapers run “back-to-school” stories. The following sample letter to the editor is written in response to such a hypothetical article. A parent, foodservice director, school administrator, community leader, or any other supporter of your message can sign this kind of letter. It should focus on one or more of the components of a healthy school nutrition environment.

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*Use official letterhead*

Roland R. Kelly, Editor  
Daleview Journal  
237 Burton Avenue  
Fair Lakes, NJ 32505

Dear Mr. Kelly:

This letter is in response to your article headlined “Let’s Keep Our Focus on the Classroom” that ran on August 5. As the school year begins, I would like to stress the importance of linking the classroom to the school dining room and the gymnasium.

There is no question that food and fitness affect how children learn. Yet we have seen an alarming trend away from physical education requirements in public schools across the country. We are becoming a sedentary people—at home and at work, as well as at school. After we drive them home from school, our kids watch television and use computers. And fewer schools require them to be physically active during the day. Only one state requires students in grades K-12 to take physical education every day.

Lack of exercise, combined with a diet too high in fat and too low in fruits and vegetables, has caused obesity among the young to skyrocket. The percentage of young people who are overweight has more than doubled since 1970—5.3 million children are now seriously overweight. Obesity is associated with a variety of risk factors for heart disease as well as cancer and other diseases. There has been a dramatic increase of children with Type 2 diabetes, which used to be called adult-onset diabetes. This, too, is linked to diet. The total cost of diseases associated with poor eating habits has been estimated at almost \$71 billion per year.

To address these problems, we need to create environments where healthy lifestyles are as easy to adopt as unhealthy ones. The place to start is in our schools, which are responsible for introducing our children to knowledge and behaviors that will help them today and throughout their lives. In a healthy school environment, the dining room and gymnasium—as well as the classroom—teach important lessons for a healthy and productive life.

Sincerely,

Frank Harkin  
Coach, Sunrise High School  
2370 Pleasant Street 32507  
Newton Grove, NJ  
(327) 447-9210



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